

**Suggested Remarks**  
**Gerry Porta, USAID/OEDG**  
**Citizens CARE General Assembly and Election**  
**Monitoring Orientation**  
**Garden Orchid Hotel, Zamboanga City**  
**September 5, 2007, 9:30 a.m.**

Distinguished guests from the Philippine  
Government;

Representatives of the Citizens Coalition  
for ARMM Elections;

Our partners in development, particularly  
our colleagues from the International  
Foundation for Election Systems (IFES),  
friends, ladies and gentlemen;

Magandang umaga po sa ating lahat.

Thank you very much for inviting me to the  
opening program of Citizens CARE's General  
Assembly and Election Monitoring

Orientation. I am honored to be with all of you today on this important occasion.

The U.S. Government, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), is very proud to support Citizens CARE as it takes this very important step in its organizational life. As a coalition of Bangsamoro civil society organizations with a shared interest in free, clean and honest elections, this first General Assembly is a vital exercise in democracy. This is the venue for the coalition to make a full accounting to its members, renew its mandate, and elect its officers.

The U.S. Government's support to Citizens CARE is part of a broader program to promote good governance, economic development and strengthen peace in Mindanao. While there are many pressing issues in all of these sectors, elections are fundamental to the democratic process and are therefore

particularly important. Credible and peaceful elections also create the stable political climate needed to strengthen peace and propel economic growth.

In this connection, I did not want to let this occasion pass without commending you on the very impressive performance of Citizens CARE during the May 14, 2007 national elections. I had the opportunity to observe the election in Cotabato City and Sharif Kabunsuan Province as part of a U.S. Embassy Election Observer team, and I witnessed for myself the passion and dedication of Citizens CARE volunteers in observing and documenting the election's conduct. In several instances I even observed Citizens CARE volunteers disregard personal safety to ensure the sanctity of the electoral process.

We understand that there are particular challenges to holding elections in the ARMM,

but this is what makes your work so significant. The difficult conditions in the ARMM require higher levels of commitment and personal sacrifice. In this context, you have made me very proud to be connected with you and the work that you do, and I am particularly gratified to see many of you here today.

It is our hope that this General Assembly will help you expand your membership and renew the vigor with which you pursue your work. As we ponder the many challenges that future ARMM elections presents, the U.S. Government wishes you success and look forward to the continued partnership between the American and Filipino people.

Maraming salamat po at mabuhay tayong lahat.